Connecticut Historical Society
BULLETIN

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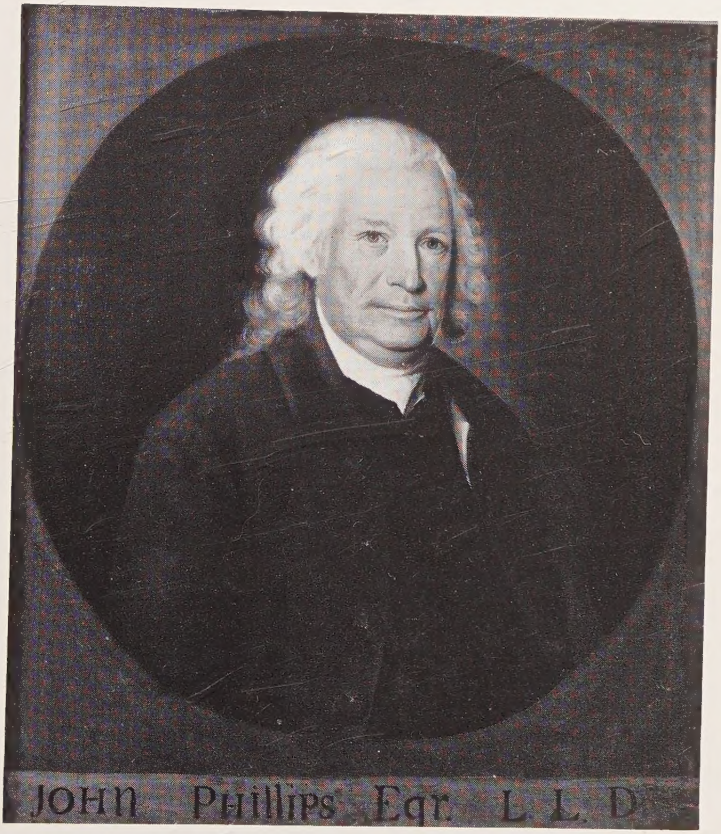
Joseph Steward and The Hartford Museum



John Phillips (1719-1795) 28 x 32½ inches

Fig. 1

In June, 1797, Joseph Steward opened a Museum in the State House at Hartford. Although he died in 1822 this collection was still intact as late as 1840, after which, some objects from the Museum became the property of this Society.

Steward was an artist of considerable skill, with some twelve or thirteen specimens of his art preserved in our collection. With the belief that he did other works not now attributed to him, we have arranged this exhibition in hopes of locating other paintings and more information on his career.

Joseph Steward was born in Upton, Massachusetts, July 6, 1753, son of Joseph and Jane (Wilson) Steward. He graduated from Dartmouth in 1780 and studied for the ministry with Dr. Levi Hart, at Preston. After he was licensed and as a candidate at Newport, R.I., he became seriously ill. May 11, 1786, Ezra Stiles collected $26 from those gathered for the election at Hartford "for Mr. Stuart [sic] sick at Rh.Isld."

Apparently this illness plagued him all his life and forced him to give up the ministry and later to open his Museum. May 31, 1789, Joseph Steward, of Upton, married Sarah Moseley in Hampton. Her father, Rev. Samuel Moseley, was pastor of the church at Hampton from May 15, 1734 until his death July 26, 1791. Three children were baptized there: Sally, otherwise Sarah, October 31, 1790; Joseph, 1792; and Mariah, June 19, 1796. December 16, 1792, Joseph Steward was admitted to communion with this church [Hampton] by a recommendation from the Church of Christ at Dartmouth College.

It was during this time that Steward definitely turned to painting. August 28, 1793, the Trustees of Dartmouth commissioned him "to take a whole length portraiture of the honorable John Phillips LL.D. to be deposited in one of the public chambers of this University at the expense of this board; said Steward having agreed to do it at the price of twelve guineas including his expenses of travelling to and from Exeter for the purpose." This is the earliest dated portrait by Steward. The upper portion from this painting is represented here [Fig. 1]. Unfortunately, there is no way of determining which came first, although the head may well have been practice for the larger painting.

At the same time, Steward was also commissioned to do a full-length figure of Eleazer Wheelock, again represented in our collection with a bust portrait [Fig. 2].

June 6, 1796, Steward announced in *The Connecticut Courant* that he had opened a painting room in the State House at Hartford and was available for portrait painting. He was chosen a Deacon in the First Church in Hartford in 1797, a post he held until his death.

The original memorial to the State Legislature requesting use of the State House for a studio is not in the State files. The memorial in May 1797 requesting use of the "east upper space chamber for portrait painting and repositing therein paintings and natural curiosities" is preserved and mentions an earlier memorial. Steward is described as of Hartford and he is a portrait painter.

From time to time announcements appeared in the public press. April 20, 1798, "he has now three hundred and fifty feet of paintings." It is assumed that at least some of these were his own works.

January 12, 1801, he lists portraits of John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Jonathan Trumbull, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas McKean, Buonaparte and

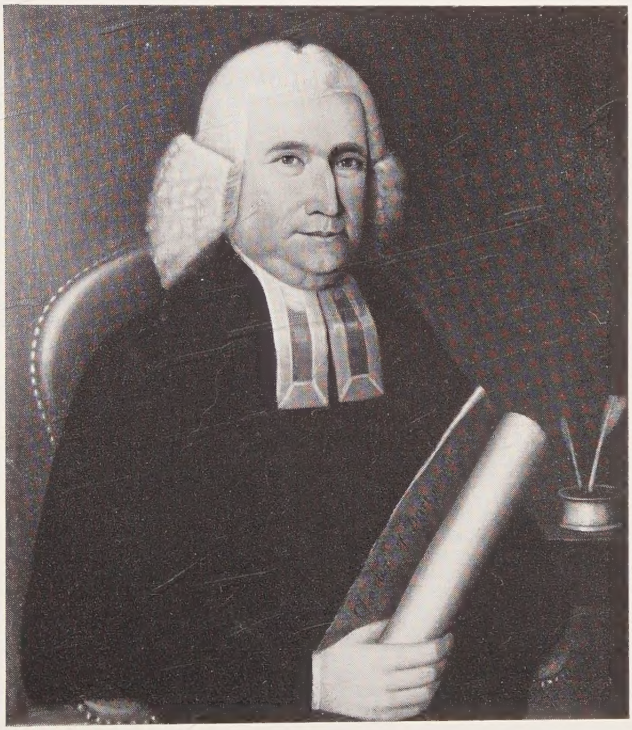
Jean Paul Marat. If these were his oil paintings, their present location is unknown.

In December 1808 the Hartford Museum moved "thirty rods north, opposite the Episcopal Church." In the *Connecticut Courant* April 19, 1815 is the last advertisement in which Steward mentions "Portrait Painting performed."

MUSEUM.

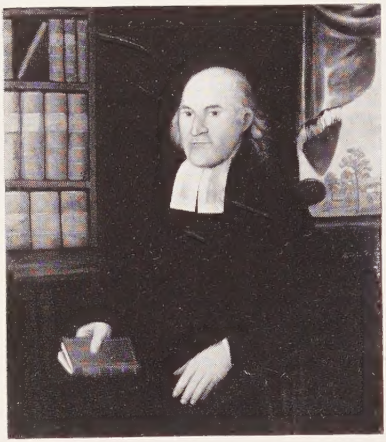
THE proprietor of the Hartford MUSEUM, having made greater additions the last year than have been made in any one year since its establishment, and from the approbation of the most intelligent strangers and others, he flatters himself the public patronage will still be continued; and that the curious who visit the Museum will be gratified.——The patronage of gentlemen sailing to foreign parts is earnestly requested, and every favour will be gratefully acknowledged.—Portrait Painting performed, and profile likenesses taken at the Museum.

☞ Admittance 25 Cents.



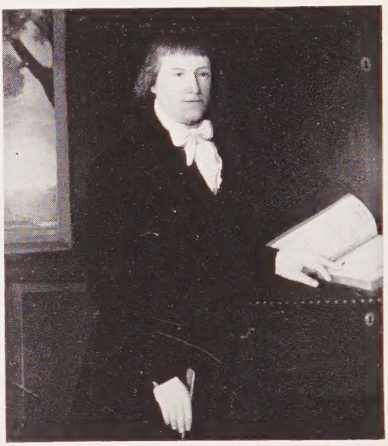
Eleazer Wheelock (1711-1779) 27 x 31½ inches

Fig. 2



Benjamin Boardman (1731-1801)
37 x 41½ inches

Fig. 3



Richard Goodman (1761-1845)
38½ x 46½ inches

Fig. 4

John C. Pease and John M. Niles, in their *Gazetteer of the State of Connecticut and Rhode Island,* Hartford 1819, give the following description of Steward's Museum:

"The Hartford Museum now in Main-street, nearly opposite the Episcopal Church, belonging to Mr. Steward, was first opened in the State House in 1801 [sic]. It was then the only establishment of the kind in the state, excepting a few articles at Yale College.

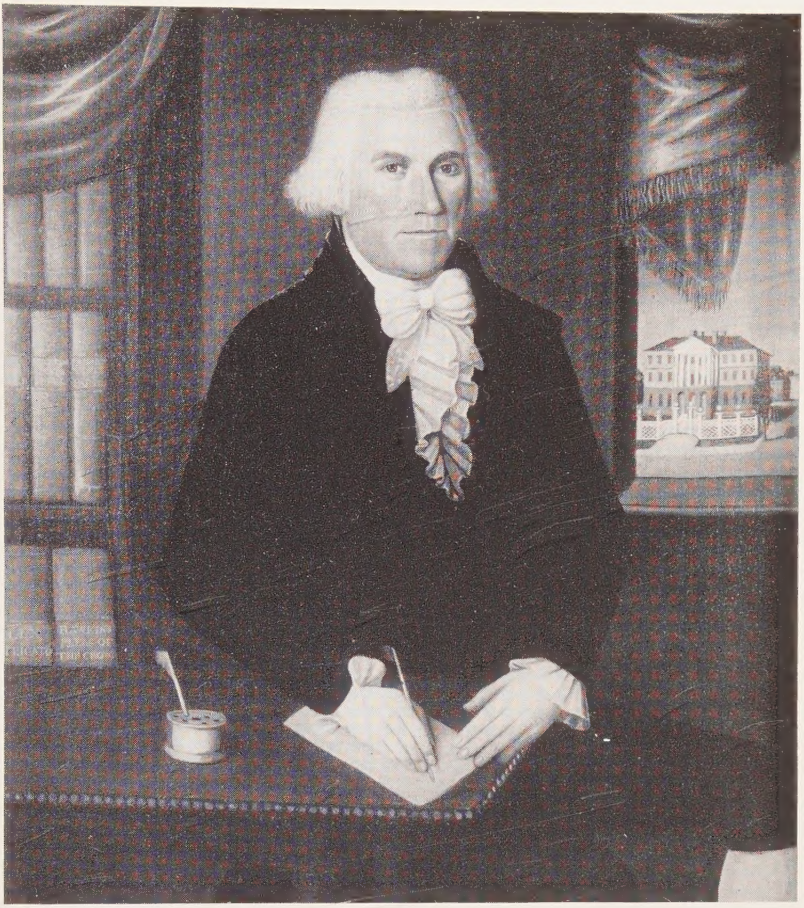
"It was so far patronised by the State, that the Legislature permitted the proprietors to occupy the two committee rooms in the State House, for the arrangement and exhibition of his Museum during the recess of the Assembly, and one room during their session. In 1808, from the industry of its ingenious proprietor and the liberality of others, the collection had so far increased, that the apartments became crowded and inconvenient, and the building which it now occupies being fitted up for the purpose, it was removed to its present situation. The room occupied by the museum is about 70 feet in length, and is neatly arranged, and handsomely filled with several thousand articles; such as paintings, waxwork, natural and artificial curiosities.

"Strangers and others, who visit the Hartford Museum, will find a gratification for their curiosity and taste."

During the latter years of his life, Steward did considerable preaching, filling in for ministerial friends from time to time and also serving as interregnum pastor of the First Church between the death of Nathan Strong, December 25, 1816 and the settlement of his successor, Joel Hawes, September 28, 1817.

With Dr. Strong and Rev. Abel Flint, Steward published in 1799 *The Hartford Selection of Hymns.* It was sufficiently successful to warrant eight editions by 1821.

It would appear likely that the bulk of Steward's paintings were done between 1793 and 1815. However, he must have done a considerable number



Jeremiah Halsey (1743-1829) 38 x 42½ inches

Fig. 5

before 1793 or Dartmouth would hardly have selected him to paint John Phillips and Eleazer Wheelock. H. W. French in *Art and Artists in Connecticut,* Boston, 1879, states that Steward painted in New Haven when but "twenty years old." No further substantiation is recorded but it seems quite likely early works may be found in the vicinity of New Haven, Preston, Newport, R.I., and Hampton.

The earliest dated portrait in our collection, in fact the only one that is dated, is that of Rev. Benjamin Boardman. He was born August 3, 1731 and his portrait was painted "aetat 65" [1796], [Fig. 3]. He was a graduate of Yale College and was pastor of the Second Church in Hartford from May 5, 1784 until his retirement in 1789-90. He continued to live in Hartford until his death February 12, 1802.

Mr. Boardman is seated in a green Windsor chair. This is the second such chair painted green that appears in our portrait collection. An interesting comparison is possible between the writing-arm Windsor chair which we refinished, using a formula dated 1801 "to paint green on Windsor chairs" printed in our *Bulletin*, January 1943, volume 9, page 12.

Also to be included among the earlier paintings is that of Jeremiah Halsey. He was born in Stonington in 1744, was Lieutenant-Colonel of Militia and had large shipbuilding interests. In 1795 he and Andrew Ward, of Guilford, gave the State $48,000 with which to complete the State House in return for Gore lands on Lake Erie. The portrait, ca. 1797, shows the State House through the window in the right background. It is the earliest known view of that structure, [Fig. 5]. The artist seated Halsey in a Hepplewhite style arm chair made by Lemuel Adams, of Hartford, for the Senate Chamber in the State House. One of twelve of this set is now owned by the Society, the gift of Ralph D. Cutler. These chairs cost £105:06:00 and were billed to Halsey May 19, 1796.

The Society has no record of the acquisition of these four paintings other than that they came from the Old Hartford Museum where they were known to have been exhibited. The original source of this information is now lost. The Halsey portrait is numbered *One* in our collection of paintings, and that of Eleazer Wheelock was in the possession of the Society as early as June 1844.

The next group of paintings by Steward appear to have been copies from earlier paintings, engravings and sculpted busts. These include portraits of William Penn (1644-1718), [Fig. 6] and Gurdon Saltonstall (1666-1724), [Fig. 7]. The Penn portrait is recorded as a copy from a bust, while the Saltonstall is a copy of an original now at Yale by an unidentified artist in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Again there is no record of acquisition, though the Saltonstall portrait is noted as having been exhibited in the Hartford Museum. It appears likely these were painted by Steward for his Museum for exhibition purposes, and not by order of an individual.

Steward was an excellent copyist, as illustrated in his portraits of Mrs. Elnathan Whitman, Oliver Wolcott and perhaps Oliver Wolcott, Jr. Mrs. Abigail (Stanley) Whitman (1719-1795), was the wife of Rev. Elnathan Whitman, pastor of the Second Church in Hartford 1732-1777. This portrait [Fig. 9] was believed to be a copy of an earlier painting by Ralph Earl, the location of which is now unknown. However, the subject holds in her hand a copy of Rev. Nathan Perkins's *Twenty-Four Discourses on some of the Important and Interesting Truths, Duties and Institutions of the Gospel . . . .* which was published in Hartford November 2, 1795. This would appear to be an original Steward after the style of Earl. The lady died November 12, 1795, so we must date the painting at that time.

The portrait of Oliver Wolcott (1726-1797), [Fig. 10] is a copy of an original by Earl now at the Connecticut State Library. It was presented to the Society by Mrs. George Gibbs (Laura Wolcott), granddaughter of the subject. Oliver Wolcott, Jr. (1760-1833), [Fig. 9] was also presented by Mrs. Gibbs, who stated it was by "Stuart." Experts decline to state that this was Gilbert Stuart and it may instead be a copy by Joseph Steward. We are inclined to doubt this but no evidence has been offered one way or the other.

Richard Goodman (1761-1845), [Fig. 4] was presented by Edward

Goodman, son of the subject. This appears to be a typical Steward portrait after the style of Ralph Earl and was probably done ca. 1800-1810.

John Lawrence (1719-1802), [Fig. 12] was presented in 1879 by Cecilia Lawrence, granddaughter of the subject.

Nathan Strong (1748-1816), [Fig. 13] appears to be one of the best portraits by Joseph Steward. Dr. Strong was pastor of the First Church in Hartford 1774-1816, and was a very close friend of the artist. Because of its excellence, it is believed that it represents one of the later portraits by Steward. Unfortunately, no record of acquisition is to be found except that it was owned by the Society as early as 1844.

The same is true for John Treadwell (1745-1823), [Fig. 11]. The record states definitely "from the Hartford Museum." Treadwell was Governor of the State from 1809 to 1811.

William Penn (1644-1718)
26 x 30 inches

Fig. 6

Gurdon Saltonstall (1666-1724)
41 x 47¾ inches

Fig. 7

On April 21, 1840, the Society held a celebration at Gilman's Hall, where numerous paintings were exhibited. The manuscript catalogue of this exhibition survives and only two portraits, that of Rev. Elnathan Whitman and Lady, are recorded as owned by the Society. Five, however, came from the Hartford Museum: Gurdon Saltonstall [assumed to be Fig. 7], Roger Wolcott, Eleazer Wheelock [assumed to be Fig. 2], second Governor Trumbull, and Oliver Ellsworth. A total of forty-five paintings were included in the exhibit, a number of which have since become the property of the Society.

Joseph Steward died April 15, 1822 after a long illness. His obituary in the *Connecticut Mirror*, April 22, 1822, is valueless as far as the Museum is concerned but gives an insight into his character:

DEATHS.

"In this City, on the 15th inst. Rev. Joseph Steward aged 69. Soon after Mr. Steward was licensed to preach, he was employed as a candidate in Newport, R.I. where he was severely afflicted by a sickness of several years continuance and which for a season cut off all hopes of future usefulness in active life. Being however partially restored and unwilling to relinquish an employment to which he had looked forward with delight through many years of close application, at the request of the society he again engaged at his favorite employment at Hampton in this state. Satisfied that his health was insufficient for the duties of a parochial teacher, more than thirty years since he removed to this city, where he resided till his death. As his health admitted he occasionally assisted his brethren in the vicinity as well as in the town.

"After the death of the late Dr. Strong, Mr. S. was employed from time to time to supply his place till the vacancy was permanently filled.

"Possessing a mild and peaceable temper, an amiable and friendly disposition, a sound and discriminating mind, and exhibiting in every department of life an uniform and consistent course of conduct, he was highly esteemed and respected as a citizen, a minister, and a christian.

"During his last illness he manifested the utmost patience under the severest suffering. He was ready and willing to depart, and in his last moments enjoyed in a peculiar manner, the consolations of that religion which he had so long professed, and which he had adorned by a holy life. *The memory of the just is blessed.*

"The following beautiful lines are peculiarly emblematical of his closing scene.

Sweet is the scene when virtue dies,
As sinks a righteous soul to rest:
How mildly beam the closing eyes;
How gently heaves the expiring breast!

So fades a summer cloud away;
So sinks the gale when storms are o'er;
So gently shuts the eye of day;
So dies the wave along the shore.

Triumphant smiles the victor brow,
Fann'd by some Angel's purple wing;
Oh Grave! where is thy vict'ry now?
Invidious Death! where is thy sting?

A holy quiet reigns around;
A calm that nothing can destroy;
Nought can disturb that peace profound;
Which their unfetter'd souls enjoy.

Farewell conflicting hopes and fears,
Where lights and shades alternate dwell,
How bright the unchanging morn appears,
Farewell, inconstant world! Farewell.

Its duty done, as sinks the clay,
Light from its load the spirit flies,
While Heaven and Earth combine to say,
Sweet is the scene, when Virtue dies."—*Com.*

Oliver Wolcott (1726-1797) 40½ x 47½ inches

Fig. 8

Steward's will, dated January 5, 1815, and inventory, are preserved in the Connecticut State Library. Survivors included his widow, Sarah, and daughters Sarah M. and Anna S. The estate totalled $11,128.49, which included the Museum building and dwelling at the corner of Main and Talcott Streets [now the site of G. Fox & Company], valued at $4,500, and "paintings, organ & all the other articles comprising the Museum," $1,200. The building was carefully distributed three ways with certain rights to each retained. One-half of the paintings, organ and other things comprising the Museum was distributed to the widow; the daughter Sarah M. received a machine for taking profiles, the paints and paint boxes of the deceased and one-fourth of the Museum. Anna S. received her one-fourth interest in the Museum along with other distributions.

The next notice of the Hartford Museum appears in the *Connecticut Mirror* January 26, 1824:

Mrs. Elnathan (Abigail Stanley) Whitman (1719-1795)
34½ x 39½ inches

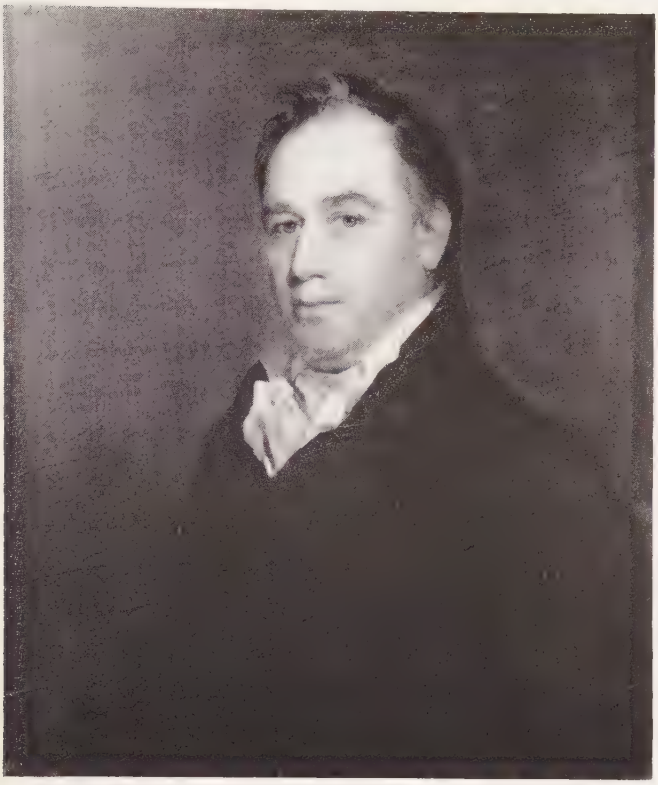
Fig. 9

HARTFORD MUSEUM
OF
Curiosities and Paintings.

THE HARTFORD MUSEUM is fitted up by an association of gentlemen at an expense of several thousand dollars, and will be opened on the 6th inst. The Paintings and Curiosities, both natural and artificial, are arranged in fine style, in a room 56 by 30, finished off in Central Row expressly for this object. The Paintings cover the walls on three sides. The collection is far more splendid than any ever before exhibited in this State. The present association design to extend the Museum under an act of incorporation to $10,000; and when the public consider that the object is not private speculation, but the increase of rational and instructive amusement, it is hoped such a patronage will be bestowed as to encourage the proprietors in their undertaking.

Admission from 9 A.M. to 9 P.M. every day, Sundays excepted. Tickets 25 cents —— Children under 12, half price.

Central Row — up stairs — Jan. 5



Oliver Wolcott, Jr. (1760-1823) 25 x 30 inches

Fig. 10

August 2, 1824, also in the *Connecticut Mirror:*

HARTFORD MUSEUM

OF

Curiosities and Paintings,

IS fitted up by an Association of Gentlemen, at an expense of several thousand dollars. The Paintings and Curiosities are arranged in fine style, in a room 56 by 30 feet, finished off in Central Row, expressly for the object. The Paintings cover the walls on three sides, and is the largest collection ever exhibited in this State. The present Association design to extend the Museum by frequent additions; and when the public consider that the object is not private speculation, but the increase of rational and instructive amusement; it is hoped such a patronage will be bestowed as to encourage the proprietors in their undertaking.

AMONG THE PAINTINGS ARE

NINETY PORTRAITS,

Many of full size in Oil Colors.

The whole of Wilson's Ornithology, with the addition of some American birds, each as large as life, (214 pieces.)

A Portrait of Washington,

Covering 80 feet of canvas; an excellent likeness.

A representation (covering 90 feet,) of Daniel interpreting to Belshazzar the hand writing on the wall, including 14 figures.

The Death of Abel,

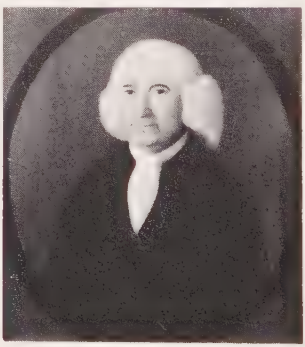
Covering one hundred feet. Adam, with parental grief, is bearing on his shoulders the dead body of Abel. Eve is lamenting the death of her son. Cain, with eyes fixed on heaven, shows the agony of despair, while separating from his family — his wife and children are introduced to complete the scene of grief.

ERISTRATUS the Physician, discovering the love of Antiochus, a young prince, for Stratonice, one of his fathers queens; 11 full figures, occupying one hundred feet of canvas.

The trial of two boys, caught by a farmer stealing apples, and brought before the court: an instructive scene for youth.* Also, four views of the

John Treadwell (1745-1823)
22½ x 26½ inches

Fig. 11



John Lawrence (1719-1802)
25½ x 29 inches

Fig. 12

* *This painting is now the property of the Society but no record of acquisition has been found.*

Battle of the Nile,

Viz. at sunset; 10 o'clock at night; midnight; and the next morning at sunrise. Among the

NATURAL CURIOSITIES

Is the head of a Royal Tiger from Bengal, the largest ever seen.

A Panther six feet long. BOIGUACA, a snake from South America, 15 feet long, large enough to swallow a boy 6 years old.

An Alligator, 7 feet long. A White Deer.

Rib of a whale 12 feet long. An Oyster Shell weighing 234 pounds. A Porcupine, with almost every rare and curious fish. 2000 Shells arranged. A valuable collection of Ores, Gold, Copper, Lead, &c. With a large collection of REPTILES, preserved in spirit.

Among the Artificial Curiosities is a

Penetrating Spy Glass,

By help of which the optician is satisfied that he can look through an inch board.

A seventy-four gun ship, made entirely of Glass.

Views of the most important cities in the world, and of the battles of our Revolution, through magnifying glasses. Elysian Fields, a Labyrinth in a Grotto, War Clubs, Turkish Gibbet Fetters, Chinese Pagodas.

American, European, African and Asiatic dexterity in the different arts, &c.&c.

P.S. There has lately been added to the Museum, a new and superior ORGAN, imported from London, which plays the *principal diapason, twelfth and fifteenth,* accompanied with the drum and triangle.

ADMITTANCE from 7 A.M. to 9 P.M.

Sundays excepted. Tickets, 25 cents. Children under 12, half price.

August 2.

Unfortunately the plan to incorporate apparently never was fulfilled for the printed legislative records make no mention of the Museum. This makes difficult the identity of the "association of gentlemen", but March 28, 1825, a C. B. Dickinson advertised in the *Connecticut Mirror:*

Adv. March 28, 1825:

☞ **Election Approaching!!**

HARTFORD MUSEUM

of Curiosities & Paintings.

THIS establishment is fitted up in the most splendid style for the reception of visitors. The additions that have been lately made to it, render it a place of much resort.

Another Large Room has

been added to the MUSEUM, which affords a much better display of the great variety of CURIOSITIES, than has been heretofore afforded.

Among the PAINTINGS,

which are very elegant, may be found

NINETY PORTRAITS

Many of full size in Oil Colours.

Together with a superb collection of

Natural Curiosities.

It is the intention of the Proprietor of this ESTABLISHMENT, to have it brilliantly illuminated ELECTION WEEK; and having been at considerable expense in making additions, &c. he looks to a generous public for remuneration.

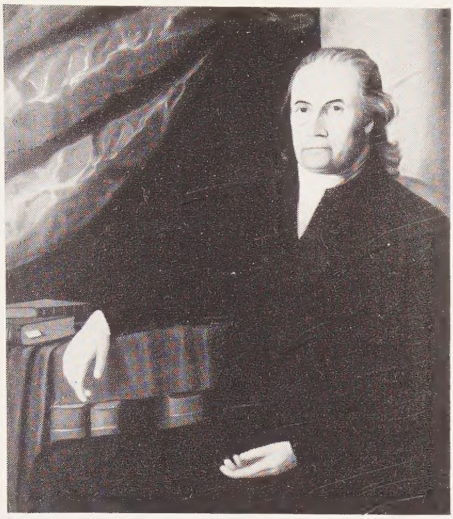
C. B. DICKINSON, Proprietor.

March 28.

John G. C. Brainerd editorialized May 2, 1825 in the *Connecticut Mirror:*

THE GALLERY OF FINE ARTS — This collection, much to the honour of the City, and much to the credit of its proprietors, is opened for the inspection of those who are fond of beautiful paintings and elegant engravings. If it were not that those concerned in it are our most intimate and best friends, some further notice might be made; but as it is, we say, without fear of contradiction, that the best judges in town, and some men of great eminence in this department of the fine arts from abroad, have pronounced the collection SPLENDID. We should honestly doubt the taste of any one, who should after viewing this display of the powers of the brush and the graver, come away dissatisfied.

The Pocket Register for the City of Hartford, 1825 lists Charles Dickerson, No. 3, Central Row as the proprietor of the Hartford Museum. The



Nathan Strong (1748-1816) 33 x 37½ inches

Fig. 13

Hartford City Directory for 1828 lists the Museum at 131 State Street .This is the same as Central Row in 1825.

Caleb Wright was proprietor in 1832 and an advertisement dated May 21, 1832 that appeared in *The Hartford Times* gives an excellent idea of the extent of the collection.

HARTFORD

MUSEUM.

THIS establishment, during the past year, has undergone a thorough reformation. The old objects of curiosity have been put in proper order, and an extensive collection of rare and valuable ones added. The Museum now consists of four spacious halls. The first is about forty-five by twenty-seven feet — This is occupied by beautiful

PAINTINGS,

Several of which, viz: — The Death of Abel — The Happy Family — Daniel Interpreting to Belshazzar the hand writing on the wall, and Erasistratus discovering the cause of Antiochus' illness, are from the pencil of the celebrated Stewart, and contain each about 60 feet of canvass. There are also a number of full length Portraits of some of our most distinguished men. The second is a gallery of

ENGRAVINGS AND PRINTS,

most of them are by distinguished Artists. The third contains a collection of

WAX FIGURES,

among which is a group representing an Execution on the Guillotine, that horrid machine by which 18,613 persons were beheaded in France, between the 21st of Sept. 1792, and the 25th Oct. 1795. The fourth Hall, which is 53 by 29 feet, contains a great variety of

NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL

CURIOSITIES,

only a part of which can be mentioned in an advertisement. An extensive collection of Minerals, Medals, Shells one an Oyster Shell weighing 117 lbs. Indian Ornaments, Pipes, Weapons, Canes, Paddles, and Fishing Utensils. Pagan Idols and models of Temples. Several Ships—one of 74 guns made entirely of glass. Among the Animals, are Serpents from South-America and the East Indies 23 feet in length. A Calf with two perfect heads. An Alligator. A Crockodile from Egypt, 18 feet in length. A Sea Dog, &c. Statue of Venus de Medici. Turkish Gibbet. Electrical Apparatus. Magnifying Glasses, through which may be seen views of many of the largest Cities in the world, Battles, &c. A Camera Obscura, exhibiting landscapes with moveable objects, in colors that the artist may attempt in vain to imitate. A penetrating Spy Glass, by which observers are usually satisfied that they can see through inch boards. A good Telescope, &c. &c.

N.B. — a room has been fitted up for the

☞ PHANTASMAGORIA, ☜

in which it will be exhibited at any time during the day or evening.

The Proprietors, grateful for the patronage received the past year, intend to continue their utmost exertions in collecting curiosities, and rendering the establishment more attractive to all who are in search either of knowledge or amusement.

Hartford, May 21st, 1832.

The *Hartford City Directory* does not list the Museum after 1838.

Mrs. Steward died February 22, 1833 and her daughter Sarah Moseley Steward, wife of Capt. Moses Emery, October 7, 1875. A careful search has failed to unearth anything from the Museum distributed in their estates. Mrs. Emery left all "paintings in oil and water colors to sister". Anna S. Steward married in 1840 the Rev. Joshua Paine Payson of Abington, who died in 1871. They had no children.

In 1833 the Steward's still owned the Museum building, but only "twenty-six chairs Museum" are inventoried. Did they sell the Museum to Dickinson? Did he in turn sell to Caleb Wright? One other painting, the Royal Arms, ca. 1724, is recorded as having been exhibited at the Museum. However, it was presented to the Society by Lorenzo Bull. Is there a connection? Perhaps someday we shall be able to find out.

The price of these Bulletins is ten cents each